To All Venerable Monks, Nuns, Lay Men And Lay Women Of The Sangha In The Tu Híeu Lineage, Inside And Outside Of Vietnam

Dear Friends,

The Twentieth Century has been marred by mass violence and enormous bloodshed. With the development of technology, humanity now has the power to "conquer" Nature. We have even begun to intervene in the chemistry of life, adapting it to our own ends. At the same time, despite new and faster ways to communicate, we have become very lonely. Many have no spiritual beliefs. With no spiritual ground, we live only with the desire to satisfy our private pleasures.

We no longer believe in any ideology or faith, and many proclaim that God is dead. Without an ideal and a direction for our lives, we have been uprooted from our spiritual traditions, our ancestors, our family, and our society. Many of us, particularly young people, are heading towards a life of consumption and self-destruction.

Ideological wars, AIDS, cancer, mental illness, and alcohol and drug addiction have become major burdens of this century. At the same time, progress in the fields of electronic and biological technology are creating new powers for mankind. In the 21st century, if humans cannot master themselves, these new powers will lead us and other living beings to mass destruction.

During the 20th century many seeds of wisdom have also sprouted. Science, especially physics and biology, has discovered the nature of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self. The fields of psychology and sociology have discovered much of these same truths. We know that this is, because that is, and this is like this, because that is like that. We know that we will live together or die together, and that without understanding, love is impossible.

From these insights, many positive efforts have recently been made. Many of us have worked to take care of the environment, to care for animals in a compassionate way, to reduce the consumption of meat, to abandon smoking and drinking alcohol, to do social relief work in underdeveloped countries, to campaign for peace and human rights, to promote simple living and consumption of health food, and to learn the practice of Buddhism as an art of living, aimed at transformation and healing. If we are able to recognize these positive developments of wisdom and action, they will become a bright torch of enlightenment, capable of showing mankind the right path to follow in the 21st century. Science and technology can then be reoriented to help build a new way of life moving in the direction of a living insight, as expressed in terms of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self.

If the 20th century was the century of humans conquering Nature, the 21st century should be one in which we conquer the root causes of the suffering in human beings—our fears, ego, hatred, greed, etc. If the 20th century was characterized by individualism and consumption, the 21st century can be characterized by the insights of interbeing. In the 21st century, humans can live together in true harmony with each other and with nature, as bees live together in their bee hive or as cells live together in the same body, all in a real spirit of democracy and equality. Freedom will no longer be just a kind of liberty for self-destruction, or destruction of the environment, but the kind of freedom that protects us from being overwhelmed and carried away by craving, hatred, and pain.

The art of mindful living expressed in concrete terms, as found in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, can be the way for all of us. The Trainings point us in the right direction for the 21st century. Returning to one's root spiritual tradition, we can find and restore the equivalent values and insights. This is a most urgent task for us all.

I respectfully propose to all Venerable Monks, Nuns, and Lay people within our Tù Híêu lineage, in Vietnam and outside of Vietnam, to carefully reflect upon the following recommendations, and to contribute some part in helping to create the direction for mankind in the New Century:

1. We should continue to set up monasteries and practice centers. These centers can organize retreats—one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days, ninety days, etc.—for monastics and for lay people, aimed at developing our capacity for transformation and healing. Activities at these centers should cultivate understanding and compassion and teach the art of Sangha building. Temples and practice centers should embody a true spiritual life, and should be places where young people can get in touch with their spiritual roots. They should be centers where the practice of non-attachment to views according to the Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing can be experienced. To cultivate tolerance according to these trainings will prevent our country and mankind from getting caught in future cycles of religious and ideological wars.

2. We should study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings in the context of a family, and establish our family as the basic unit for a larger Sangha. Practicing deep listening and mindful speech, we will create harmony and happiness, and feel rooted in our own family. Each family should set up a home altar for spiritual and blood ancestors. On important days, the entire family should gather to cultivate the awareness and appreciation of their roots and

origins, thus deepening their consciousness of these spiritual and blood ancestors. Accepting the stream of ancestors in our own being, we draw on their strengths and recognize their weaknesses, in order to transform generations of suffering. Each family should recognize the importance of having one member of their family devote his or her life to the learning and practice of the Dharma, as a monastic or a lay person. The family should invest in, support, and encourage this family member.

3. We should give up our lives of feverish consumption, and transfer all merits of action created by thoughts, speech, and work to the Sangha. Our happiness should arise from understanding, compassion, and harmony, and not from consumption. We should see the happiness of the Sangha as our own happiness.

4. We should invest the time and energy of our daily life in the noble task of Sangha building. We should share material things that can be used collectively by the Sangha, such as houses, cars, television, computers, etc. We should give up alcohol, drugs, and smoking. We should learn to live simply, so that we may have more time to live our daily life deeply and with freedom. Living simply, we become capable of touching the wonders of life, of transformation and healing, and of realizing our ideal of compassion in the educational, cultural, spiritual, and social domains of our lives.

The 21st century is a green, beautiful hill with an immense space, having stars, moons, and all wonders of life. Let us climb the hill of the next century, not as separate individuals but as a Sangha.

Let us go together, hand in hand, with our spiritual and blood ancestors, and our children. Let us enjoy the climb together with our songs and our smiles, and allow each step to create freedom and joy and peace.

Wishing you and your Sangha a wonderful century full of faith and happiness,

Thich Nhat Hanh

Elder of the Tu Hiêu Lineage